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I Have a Student In My Class Who Stutters. What Should I Do?

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Stuttering impacts approximately five percent of students during their lifetime, so many teachers struggle to create the best classroom environment for students who stutter. Stuttering, which is a type of fluency disorder, interrupts the flow of speech and can create a barrier for students to communicate during class discussions, oral presentations, and reading out loud. Students who stutter are as intelligent and creative as other students and have invaluable contributions to the learning environment. Below are some suggestions for teachers to promote communication in the classroom:



During one-on-one interactions

- Keep an open dialogue with the student about what he/she needs to communicate effectively while maintaining academic expectations. Stuttering is often unpredictable; some days may be more difficult than others for the student to speak.
- Maintain eye contact.
- Avoid instructing the student to, “Relax,” “Slow down,” or “Think about what you want to say.” The student is already trying to speak fluently. These remarks cause unneeded pressure and are not helpful to the student.
- Avoid finishing the student’s sentences. This may seem helpful but can make the student feel what they say is not important.
- Only remind the student to use fluency techniques if instructed to do so by his/her speech-language pathologist.



During classroom discussion

- Model speaking habits that you would like to see in your students, such as speaking slowly and clearly.
- Give the student opportunities to speak and praise attempts to participate orally.
- Teach all students how to be excellent listeners by maintaining eye contact, actively thinking about the message of the speaker, and waiting for their turn to speak.
- Teach all students to be awesome communicators by modeling “think time” rather than quickly calling out answers.



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The most important point to emphasize to students who stutter is that what they say is important, not how they say it. By focusing on the content of the message, the student can feel more motivated to speak and confident that his/her ideas are an integral part of the conversation. For further tips on how to create a better communication environment, consult with your school's Speech-Language Pathologist.

Oral reports and reading aloud

- Rehearse oral reports with the student before he/she presents and come up with a plan on how the report will be presented.
- Use a random order when selecting who goes next to read. Picking presenters in a set order can create anticipation and anxiety.

Resources:

"Educators." National Stuttering Association, accessed August 10, 2018, <http://www.nsastutter.org/>

"FAQs for Teachers." Stuttering Foundation, accessed August 9,, 2018, <https://www.stutteringhelp.org/faqs-teachers>

"Five Myths About Stuttering." Stuttering Foundation, accessed August 15, 2018, <https://www.stutteringhelp.org/five-myths-about-stuttering>

"Stuttering." American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, accessed August 9, 2018, <https://www.asha.org/public/speech/disorders/stuttering.htm#other>

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